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Food and Home Notes

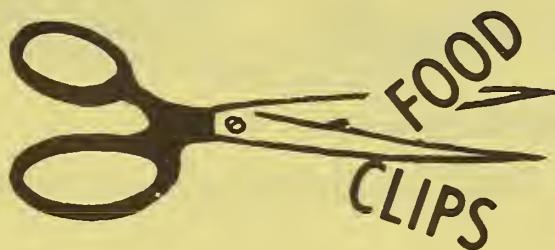
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If you're using a high proportion of milk in a casserole be sure to bake it at low oven temperatures because protein in milk coagulates into a film on top sometimes and coats the sides of the casserole if the temperature has been high.

* * *

Prolonged high oven temperature also causes off-flavors — and sometimes — scorching of milk, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture home economists.

* * *

Sour half-and half- may be used in place of sour cream in many recipes.

* * *

"Fruitleathers" — pureed fruits dried to the pliable stage and rolled for easy out-of-hand eating may be frozen. They're welcome food gifts for hikers or campers. In the frozen state they keep well for about a year, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture home economists.

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IT'S SNOW TIME

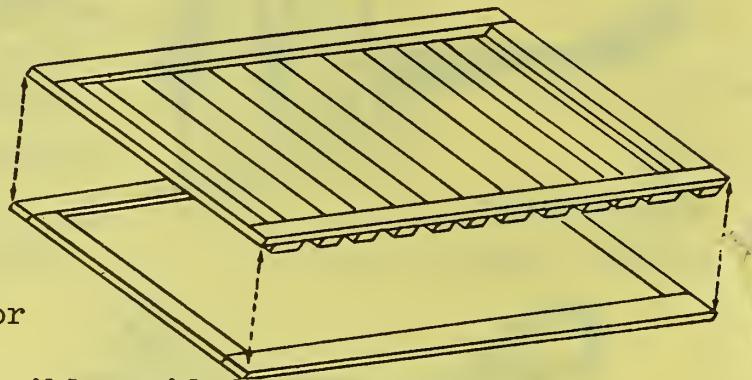
COMMON SENSE IN WINTERTIME

The National Forests are filled with snowtime activities for your enjoyment. In some areas, persons traveling by skis, snowmobiles or snowshoes must share a common trail. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service has a booklet on how you can help avoid accidents in heavily congested areas. Also included in the pamphlet are tips on what to do if you're lost or injured, and treatments for sickness (ie: frostbite, hypothermia) which could effect the winter traveler.

If you would like a copy of Winter Travel in the National Forest, Program Aid 1089, write to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Equipment needed: For home drying you only need your oven, some drying racks or trays, an oven thermometer and a small fan.

For sun drying you need temperatures over 98°F and low relative humidity. Food should also be covered by cheesecloth if it is to be left outside. Do not use a galvanized, fiberglass, vinyl or copper screen over your drying trays because of possible acid reaction which could be a health hazard. Ideally, you could construct a small wooden slat type box — and cover it with cheesecloth.

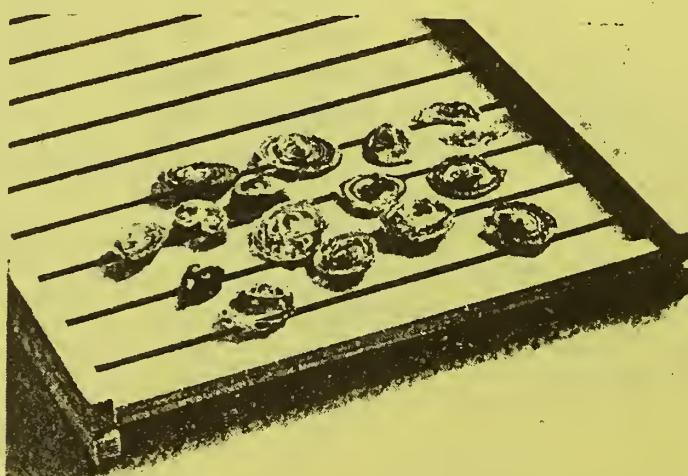
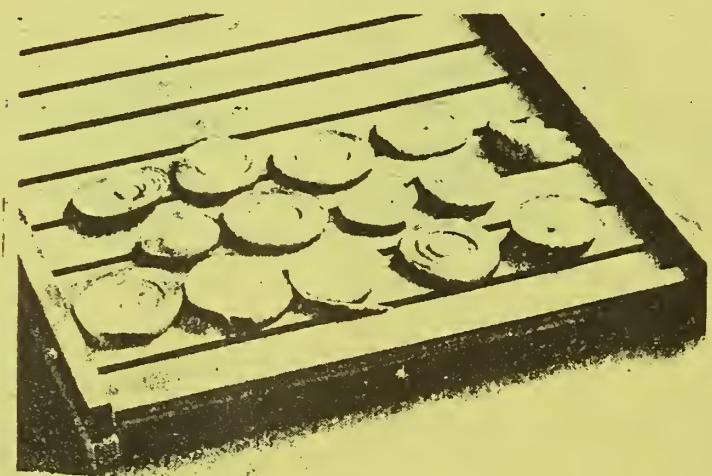


What to dry? A rule of thumb might be that if it is not suitable for eating fresh then it is not suitable for drying either.

Pre-drying treatment: Vegetables should be blanched (scalded or parboiled in hot water or steamed) to inactivate enzymes in the food which might cause deterioration of color and flavor during drying or storage (even though blanching may cause some loss of nutrients).

Oven drying is not recommended for sulfured* fruits because of the objectionable odor of the sulfur fumes — sulfuring (exposing to sulfur fumes) should always be done outdoors away from close contact with plants, shrubs, trees and children. Sulfuring effectively maintains the quality and nutrients to the food during drying and storage.

Fruits and vegetable pieces should be placed on trays in single layers. Some foods should be dried to the brittle stage; others should be pliable or leathery.





food then and now

ON DRYING FOODS —

By drying foods you can save money and time, and have foods that add variety to the diet, says Dr. Evelyn Johnson, Extension Service nutritionist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Drying is one of the less exact methods of preserving food because the way that you do it depends on the climate where you live and the equipment you have at hand. Drying practices have changed little through the years — nearly everyone can dry some food at home — and, at little, or no energy cost. In some instances you can simply use the escaping heat from the furnace or home heater — or even the freezer motor is all that may be needed to get a satisfactorily dried product.

You've never dried any foods? No problem. Begin with herbs and fruits, and you can soon dry onions, celery leaves, dill weed, parsley, green pepper, zucchini, green beans, apples and sweet potatoes. These foods can be oven dried — often immediately after the oven has been used for baking.

Many homemakers feel that home dried foods are superior in flavor and color to similar bought foods. One of the "secrets" might be that you're working with small amounts of fresh food — and you plan for relatively short storage periods (of six months to a year).

Features of Dried Foods. One of the joys of dried foods is convenience. Their storage requires little space and it is simple to reach for the container on the shelf when 2 spoonfuls of chopped onion or green pepper is needed for a sauce or casserole. Another important feature of dried foods is that they are safe to use, Dr. Johnson comments. They retain their quality for many months — IF you remember to fasten jar lids tightly in place. Remember — Don't ever put a wet spoon into your dried food — or you'll defeat your purpose.

The high caloric and nutritive values of dried fruits may best be understood if you realize that it takes 5-1/2 pounds of fresh apricots to yield one pound when dried. Eighteen medium size apples weighing about 6 pounds dries out to about one pound...so dried fruits go a long way.

Some dried food specialities are very popular — fruit leathers, beef jerky, or salmon jerky. Often making "fruit leathers" is a good way to use overripe fruit by pureeing it, adding sugar (if it's orange or pineapple) pouring onto a sheet or tray and allowing it to dry. Sun drying takes two or three days, depending on the temperature and humidity. Just test for doneness. Beef or salmon jerky is made by slicing into strips and adding salt (to fish) and seasoning to beef. It may be prepared by either sun or oven drying.

It is important to remember that drying is not the total answer to all food preservation just because it sounds easy. There are trade-offs. Natural vitamin C is lost during the drying process, but since Americans do not rely on dried foods for vitamin C in their diet this should not be a problem.

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ON DRYING FOODS (CON'T)

The proper packaging and storage of dehydrated foods is extremely important. If not carefully packaged all your efforts will be in vain. Dehydrated foods are usually free from insects when removed from dehydrator or oven. Sun dried foods could be contaminated and should be packaged and placed in the home freezer for 48 hours to kill any possible insects or their eggs. All dried foods should be packaged as soon as they are cool into dry, scalded, insect-proof containers...or in plastic bags, tightly sealed. The containers should immediately be stored in a dry, cool, and dark place.

Don't forget — rehydration is necessary before using dried foods. For fruits and some vegetables, it may take up to two hours.

Drying foods was, in the olden days, and still remains, a good way to preserve surplus food when the freezer is crowded — or when canning jars are full—or if this method just appeals to you. U.S. Department of Agriculture does not have a publication specifically on how to dry foods, but many State Universities do, and your local Cooperative Extension Home Economists can give you detailed instructions. *

Don't dry foods that your family doesn't like or won't want to eat...that would be poor use of family money and time.

*These articles on food preservation cannot offer more detailed instructions due to the lack of space. They are prepared with Dr. Johnson of the Extension Service in an effort to offer methods and ideas for economical food preservation.



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